

The Boy in Quarantine

In the very populated area of Lahore, Shah Jamaal, there was a villa. In that villa lived three children Ali, Sohaib, and Maryam and their parents. Ali, tall and blue-eyed, was the eldest and wisest; Sohaib was strong and the naughtiest, with his black shining eyes; Maryam with long blonde hair always had unique ideas.

While enjoying mangoes in the hot afternoon of May in the lawn of their house, they were making plans for the upcoming Eid. They were all excited about Eid-ul-Fitr because the whole family was supposed to get together for Eid. Their cousins from England had already got their tickets booked and were expected to reach two days before Eid, so that they could all do some Eid shopping together and enjoy Chaand Raat.

They were spending Eid in Pakistan after five years so everyone was counting days. Sohaib's favorite Uncle AJ had completed his PhD in Pharmaceutical Science and he was coming back on Chaand Raat. Hence, all kids were excited and busy in making plans.

Suddenly it started raining. The sparkling raindrops looked like crystals with dark clouds in the background. Dry soil gave out a sweet smell as it welcomed the rainwater. All the kids rushed inside. There was still some time for Iftaar. Mama was busy in the kitchen, as one could guess from the yummy aroma of the pakoras and samosas filling the house. Dad was in the living room, his eyes glued on TV. Dad's expression showed that there was something unusual in the news. All three kids sat down quietly and what they heard was very strange and unexpected.

They all had an interest in horror movies but encountering anything like that in real life was totally unexpected and shocking. It was all over in the news that some new kind of virus was spreading in some remote village of Japan. The alarming thing about this new virus was that it was fatal and highly contagious. It could spread not only through human interaction, but could also spread through social media like Facebook, video call or video sharing. It was spreading like a wild-fire and had already infected people in more than 50 countries of the world in just one week.

Luckily, Pakistan was still among the countries safe from the virus. All countries were talking about importance of personal hygiene, social distancing and blocking social media like Facebook, Skype, WhatsApp, etc. because the virus could infect people right from the apps in their cell-phones, tablets and computers.

Maryam at once turned pale with horror and said, "If this novel virus is so contagious how can we protect ourselves? Even personal hygiene doesn't matter much."

Dad said, "Personal hygiene does matter in this outbreak though there are more chances (56.987%) to get infected from technology."

They were discussing this new pandemic and hoping it to be some kind of media joke. Landline telephone rang and everyone's attention was diverted. It was a phone call from their cousins from England. Usually, they talked to each other using Skype or WhatsApp, so it was surprising that they called on the landline. Their aunt told Dad that the virus was already spreading in their community, so they have stopped using all kinds of social media. She also told that their flights were cancelled, and they were quarantining in their homes. This news made everyone sad. This was not all. After that they heard everyone else's flight was also cancelled. No country was allowing any international or even domestic flights.

One day, Sohaib being the naughtiest opened Facebook. Everyone got scared. Sohaib might get the new virus, so Mom confiscated all of Sohaib's devices.

"Hey! That's not fair," said Sohaib

That night, he got his devices back. When he opened a social media application he saw that his device had started going corrupt. And then all he remembered was the world going black. When he woke up, he found himself in a car.

His brother Ali said, "Look at yourself" and when he looked in the mirror in front of him, he was horrified. He saw that one of his eyes was turning blue and his left cheek was pale. He could see the blue veins on his cheeks, while his forehead was white like paper. Soon they reached the hospital. Everyone noticed that he was miserable and coughing A LOT.

When they reached home, Maryam said, "I feel bad for Sohaib."

Dad said, "It was his choice to take a risk and use the social media and he is the first case in Pakistan."

Ali was positive that Sohaib had learnt his lesson and so did everyone else. The doctors had to put Sohaib in isolation. The quarantine was very hard on him because he was constantly in pain and it was unbearable, so he was often asleep. Doctors had tried hard to treat him. Finally, his quarantine finished, and he was very much relieved and satisfied but that feeling soon ended.

As he stepped out of the hospital, he felt sad for all those poor souls who were coughing and sneezing. He said to himself, "Nobody should suffer like this."

When he reached home, he was told that his uncle AJ was lucky enough to catch a special flight to Pakistan and was waiting for Sohaib. He decided to meet his uncle with a mask on and observed proper social distancing. There was determination on his face. He visited his uncle in his newly established laboratory and was amazed by what he saw.

Sohaib saw that there were huge monitors, beakers, microscopes and cylinders. There were many syringes and bottles filled with a liquid, ruby red and fizzy with a lot of foam and bubbles, giving out an acidic smell. The room was all white. There was a small staircase which led to a huge desk with a master computer where his uncle sat.

After looking at the lab, he met his uncle who had jet-black hair, stone dark eyes and snow-white skin, and who was looking like an alien. They had a discussion in a room with black door, a long white table and white

walls with horizontal streaks of red. Sohaib told his uncle about the hospital and how he wanted to make the vaccine. When their discussion was over, his uncle gave him a clue: "The real virus is not a computer virus." Sohaib pondered over this and then finally asked for permission to leave, still confused and perplexed.

When Sohaib was about to open the door, his uncle ran to him and yelled "WAIT! WAIT!"

Sohaib said, "Yes, uncle?"

His uncle said, "These are keys to a secret high-tech lab. It has Artificial Intelligence and Robots. You are going to need it also. I will pay for the bills."

Sohaib said, "Thank you uncle." And left.

When he reached the lab, it was just like his uncle's lab. There was a big glass container filled with liquids to suck nutrients or germs out of an organism. There were also 15 robots to help him with experiments. The robots were sitting on chairs, their arms were moving like humans. They had a shiny silver colour, and they had ruby red eyes and a silver head with an antenna sticking out of it. They had no toes but had fingers. They made a rustling sound every time they moved a limb, their lights turned red to blue. He had all the data about the virus. He learned about the symptoms of the virus. He researched how to make a vaccine. He figured out he couldn't do it alone so he decided to ask his siblings if they could help him in making the vaccine.

When they all reached the lab, they were surprised too. It looked like a mansion and a science lab combined. They could not believe how Sohaib had got it. When they asked him how he got access to the lab,

Sohaib said, "I got access with Uncle AJ's help."

After a few minutes, Ali asked Sohaib, "So what's the plan?"

Sohaib said, "This may sound crazy but let's do experiments on the virus. We will stay in a view center with a huge glass window, and we will control the robots from there. Then we will be safe from the virus."

They all agreed with the plan but there was one problem, where would they get the patients from?

After that they found some infected patients and asked them if they were willing for the test. Surprisingly, the patients said yes. So, they got a medical van from Sohaib's laboratory and then they put the patients in the medical vans with the help of 4 robots. When they reached the lab, they put one of the patients in the big container filled with liquid.

After they put the patient in the container, they sucked the half dead virus in a syringe and put in some of the medicines used to treat the symptoms. Then they sucked some of the new mixture and did some more experiments on that mixture. The vaccine was then half made. They did tests on the other patients. They had almost made the vaccine but Maryam accidentally spilled it.

She exclaimed, "Oh I am so sorry!"

They had to make it again, so they went to another patient and they did the same procedure. They then thought they were done but just in case they visited their uncle to check. Uncle AJ was astonished and checked if the formula was correct. It indeed was correct!

Then he did some computer research for two hours. Meanwhile, the three children ate dinner there.

Maryam was getting impatient and said, "What is uncle doing for so long?"

They all replied, “We don’t know!”

When uncle was done, he said it was correct and he was very very proud of all of them, especially Sohaib. “He had saved humanity,” he said. He gave them the vaccine and told them to leave.

The next morning they went to a science lab and submitted the vaccine for trial. The scientist gave it to the nearest hospital and then in a month, the young inventors became famous throughout the world. “It was not fame he wanted; it was the betterment of humanity he really desired.”

The words hit Dad’s ears as he turned on TV. He could not believe it was no other than his own Sohaib giving an interview to an international channel.

Though their family could not get together on Eid-UI-Fitr, everyone was able to come home to celebrate Eid-ul-Azha. They earned the title of Little Scientists and even now they are doing many things at their home, inventing, designing, and thinking for the betterment of humanity.

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